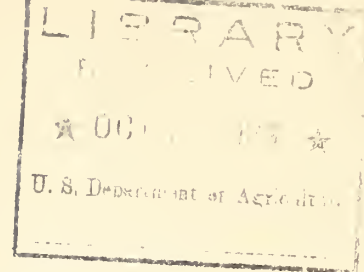


Historic, Archive Document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

1.9
F7-2Ra



HOW THE PURE FOOD LAW PROTECTS YOUR POCKETBOOK

Radio talk by P. B. Dunbar, Assistant Chief, Food, Drug, and Insecticide Administration, delivered through WRC and 31 other stations associated with the Nation Broadcasting Company, Thursday, September 26, 1929, Eastern Standard Time.

Several weeks ago it was my privilege to tell you of some of the sensational types of food adulteration that existed at the time the Federal pure food law was passed about 22 years ago. Today we are accustomed to receive pure foods, truthfully labeled. We accept them as a matter of course. Were history to be turned back twenty years--were the honesty and purity of our foods to go back tomorrow to the conditions which existed when the food law first became effective, the contrast would be distressingly obvious to everyone.

Most food manufacturers are honest. Left to their own devices, without the pressure of dishonest competition, they would sell honest merchandise. Unfortunately there are in every line of business certain individuals whose avarice exceeds their sense of honesty. These, without the restraint of the law, are almost certain through competition to force honest concerns down to their own level. It is because these individuals exist in the food business that the Food, Drug and Insecticide Administration of the United States Department of Agriculture, which enforces the pure food law must be continuously on the alert. Every dishonest dollar made in the sale of foods comes out of the consumer's pocketbook. It is our business to see that consumers get their money's worth. I want to give you a few examples of the kind of cheats our inspectors are continually unearthing and bringing before the courts for punishment.

A few weeks ago one of our inspectors was making a survey of the brands of olive oil on the market. He found a shipment that to all outward appearances was in the original container in which it had been imported. It was plainly labeled olive oil. The inspector knew that our port laboratories carefully inspect all importations of olive oil, but with the second sight which an experienced food inspector develops, aided perhaps by a knowledge that this particular distributor had a shady reputation, he played a hunch and sampled the shipment. Analysis in our laboratories showed that the product was not olive oil, but consisted entirely of cottonseed oil--a wholesome product, but one which the purchaser can buy at a much lower price. This shipment and several others made by the same firm were seized by the Government as in violation of the food and drugs act. Olive oil retails at around \$4.50 a gallon. Cottonseed oil, which the cans in question contained, sells at about \$2.15 per gallon. The difference, say, \$2.35, represents the profit on each gallon which this dishonest manufacturer expected to take from the unwitting consumer. He would have been successful had not the vigilance of the inspector detected the fraud.

The olive oil case is particularly interesting because it illustrates the lengths to which a dishonest food purveyor will go in attempting to make an illegal profit. The cans of olive oil in this consignment did not appear to have been tampered with. We knew that at the time of importation they contained pure

olive oil. Now, then, was the substitution of a cheap oil for a more expensive one affected? A careful examination of the containers showed that the handles had been carefully removed and small holes punched where the handles had been. Through these holes the original olive oil had been drained away and cottonseed oil poured in. Then the handles had been neatly soldered back over the punctures and to all appearances the can was just the same as it was when it came into the country. If the ingenious gentleman had exerted half the energy in doing an honest business, he would be materially better off today.

Another illustration. Butter is one of the commodities that is found on almost every American table three times day. By act of Congress it must contain not less than 80% butterfat. The food and drugs act also provides that butter in packages must bear a statement of the weight of the contents. If the butter you serve upon your table were permitted by the food inspectors to contain 2% less than the prescribed 80% of butterfat, and if, further more, each pound of butter were permitted to be 2% short weight, you would lose in the neighborhood of two cents on each pound of butter you buy. A great deal of work is done by the Federal food authorities to make sure that you get exactly what you pay for when you buy butter. In the Chicago district alone during the past six weeks more than forty consignments of butter were seized by the Government because of a slight shortage of weight or a deficiency in butterfat.

"But," you say, "two cents a pound is after all a very small item. Just where does the consumer profit materially by these operations."

If you will stop to consider that nearly 1-1/2 billion pounds of creamery butter are produced in the United States annually, and that this butter retails at 50 cents or more a pound, you can get some idea of the magnitude of the loss the American consumer would suffer if the Government did not insist, by its enforcement of the food law, that butter shall be of full weight and of standard composition. The retail value of that 1-1/2 billion pounds of butter is about 750 million dollars. A loss to the consumer of two cents a pound through adulteration or misbranding would mean that if all our butter were equally in violation of the law American consumers would lose annually on butter alone at least fifteen million dollars. I do not mean to imply that all butter is short weight and low in butterfat. Very little of it is adulterated or misbranded in any particular, but in the absence of official surveillance it has been repeatedly shown that there is a gradual reduction in the quality of our food supply to meet the dishonest competition forced upon decent manufacturers by unscrupulous competitors. That would be the case with butter. Now it costs a little over one million dollars to enforce all of the provisions of the food and drugs act. That is, it costs every man, woman and child in the United States about one cent annually to insure the purity of the food and drug supply. Bear in mind that butter is only one item in the American food supply, yet the potential saving on butter alone would pay the cost of enforcing the law nearly fifteen times.

I have time to cite only one further illustration. After 22 years of food law enforcement, the canned food industry may almost be looked upon as a model. Yet 22 years ago there was a well merited suspicion in the minds of most consumers about the average canned food product. A great many things were wrong with the canned food picture in our early struggles to enforce the food and drugs act. I will touch today upon only one of the causes of dissatisfaction. That

was the practice known as slack filling. In the old days a can of peas, for example, might contain several spoonfuls of peas and the remainder of the can be filled with brine or water. The unsuspecting purchaser had no means of protection, for the can could not be examined until its identity had been destroyed by the use of the can opener. Money was paid, then, not for a canful of peas, but for a few peas and a lot of water, and the water could have been obtained at the pump at a much lower cost. Honest manufacturers who wished to give the consumers their money's worth could not compete with this unfair competition. About the only properly branded article of that sort that I recall was a can of oysters which contained one single solitary oyster, floating pathetically around in a sea of brine. It was labeled "The Lone Star Brand" and we had to admit that the brand was honestly descriptive. Today, by contrast, through the operation of the food and drugs act and the loyal cooperation of honest canners, it is almost impossible to find on the market a can of food that is not full of the product it purports to contain. The profit is primarily the consumer's, although it cannot be denied that the honest elements of the canning industry have equally profited through the enhanced confidence in their products.

When you consider that in the last 22 years more than 16,000 cases of violation under the food and drugs act have been brought to justice by the Federal officials, and that a large proportion of them involved a financial cheat to the consumer, you can get some idea of the vast saving accomplished by the enforcement of the law. I want to close with an earnest injunction to all those who buy food products to use their eyes to read and their brains to interpret intelligently the labels of all the food products they purchase. Foods must be honestly labeled. They must, moreover, carry a plain and conspicuous statement of their weight or volume. If you carelessly carry home a can labeled cottonseed oil, when you thought you were buying olive oil, you have only yourself to blame, because you did not use your eyes. If you see two packages of cereal of different brands standing side by side upon the shelf and apparently of the same size, quality and quantity of contents and offered at the same price, you deserve to be stung if you do not take the trouble to read the net weight statement on the package and decide which is the better buy. A little mental arithmetic, involving a comparison between weights and prices will often show you that the cheapest package is not by any means the best buy. The Government can and does insure honest labeling; it can and does insure the purity of the food supply; it can ^{does} and insure that a correct statement of net weight appears upon the labels; but unless you will cooperate by using your eyes and your brains in applying the information that the Government guarantees, you are not going to receive the maximum protection of your pocketbook which the law affords.
